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WHY WOMEN MARRY.

BY MRS. JOHN SHERWOOD.

IT IS a very difficult task to answer Mrs. Kate Gannett Wells's brilliant paper in the last number of *THE REVIEW*, because she goes on answering herself. I have always admired her gallant assault on an ethical problem, and find it difficult to break a lance with her. However, I differ honestly from one or two of her opinions, and shall endeavor to say so respectfully.

I do not believe prudence or "the original sinfulness of man" has ever kept a woman from marrying. Mrs. Wells says that "the working woman dreads man. She knows him as contractor, boss, night-fiend, betrayer, and she wants none of him." With this postulate I disagree. Who has not had a superior housemaid, nurse, or even nursery governess, who went wild over this "contractor, boss, night-fiend, and betrayer" and would marry him, willy nilly, and be poor, deserted, miserable, but fond and affectionate, ever after?

The immortal epic of Nancy Sykes tells the whole story. It is a sad truth. One hates to acknowledge it. Women love brutes; they adore strength; they love, as a dog does, the master, and, although civilization has brought in some terrible complications, there is something honorable and natural in this strange contradiction. The man should have just enough of the brute in him to kill, as Adam did, the deer for the family dinner. He should be able to knock something on the head—presumably not his wife. Even through all the grades, from Adam down to an English duke, women have in their secret hearts this adoration of masculine power, and I remember hearing at a dinner-table in London, three years ago, where the differences of a certain noble couple were being discussed (they had just gone through the divorce court), this remark from a delicate and elegant countess, who was a friend of the wife:

“You see, Anastasia was one of those women who needed kicking down stairs, and Marmaduke was gentle ; he was *not up to it.*”

This is putting it brutally ; it is the plain English of it ; but who does not know some dissatisfied woman of fashion who loathes her rather stupid husband, who does not know enough “*to kick her down stairs*” ? That is, he has not inspired her with a *respect for his strength*. She ought to be (she wishes she could be) afraid of him, but she is sorry to acknowledge to her own heart that she is his superior. It saps her love for him. They are in a false position towards each other.

And rising above the housemaids and the nursery governess, do we not all know some gentle, superior, educated women who have loved and married men whom they knew to be gamblers, drunkards, and brutes ? It is the superior woman who does this. Jane Eyre loved Rochester, although we see, who are looking on, that she was far his superior. He was simply masculinity on a black horse, the Centaur—sublime allegory of strength. He was her man of men. How splendidly the little Yorkshire woman pictures it for us in her noble English, as she paints the vapid manikins and womankins of fashion who gathered in that state-ly drawing-room. As Rochester tries to make love to one of them who would like to marry him for his money, we feel, all the time, how inferior she is to the plain little Jane in the corner in this great *power of loving* ; aye, and we feel how illogical is Jane to love Rochester so much ; but we respect her for it : it is womanly.

But Mrs. Wells will say, and very truly, that every woman is not a Jane Eyre ; that some are so prudent and so selfish that they ask if half the husband’s wage will be given to them ; if it will not be more comfortable to live alone, and to save the money earned for one’s self. These are very rare women. Did Mrs. Wells ever reason with a housemaid in love, or a schoolmistress, or a fashionable girl who wished to refuse fifteen millions and marry the man of her choice ?

I do not agree with Mrs. Wells in the supposition that the higher education, or philanthropy, or the pursuit of an honorable profession drives out of a woman’s head the idea of marriage. A profession is a refuge for a woman who has not been able to marry the man of her choice, or, having married him, has found him utterly uncongenial, or, as some witty woman said, “insupport-

able, and therefore to be supported." I have seen the most educated, the busiest, and the most superior women, at forty years of age glad to marry some very inferior weak creature, so great a craving had their noble hearts for love. Women who are exceptionally strong can stifle this hunger of the heart. "It requires," said Miss Sedgwick, "a very superior woman to be an old maid. Almost anybody can be a good wife."

Higher education has opened much that gives dignity and peace to a woman who has missed her destiny, which is marriage; but it does not keep a "double first" from wishing to marry, although it does undoubtedly make her less attractive to men to be so "very superior."

For, to return to that savage idea of nature which makes the brutal man attractive, a man likes a woman to be his inferior. She must be as feminine as he is masculine, and the first claim of femininity is this: that the woman looks up to the man. Who that has read Mrs. Oliphant's excellent story of "Miss Majoribanks" but recalls half a dozen such very superior women of his own acquaintance who were wrecked as to marriage by their very superiority? The man felt that he could offer neither protection, assistance, nor help to these very superior creatures. I often hear of such women, who are apt to be heavily freighted with self-conceit. "Oh, she could have married anybody, but she does not wish to marry." I never believe this. I think the legend should read: "She would have married almost anybody if she could." I am sure, had I been a man, I should not have wished to marry her.

A woman who thus gives the idea that she is a law unto herself loses her power of attraction, and it is one argument against the half-education which we misname the higher education that it sometimes produces an unhappy mixture of this kind. The true education, the highest education, places a woman exactly on a level with her mate. She loves the man who is her superior. She adores his superiority of mind, as she rejoices in the bigness of his hands and the superior largeness of his feet, which give him the physical strength for a mountain climb or the power of pulling at the sails of his yacht. He and she are the complements of a perfect whole. That is the ideal marriage.

No doubt there are many women—very grand women they are, too—who, like Miss Martineau, refuse to marry for physical con-

siderations—ill health ; the fear of hereditary disease ; the desire to save the beloved husband that should have been from unnecessary burdens. All honor to such women ; they are the silent martyrs. “’T is better to have loved and lost,” etc. Such women are not unhappy.

But the sad reason why most women do not marry is because they have not had a chance. When we read that there are sixty thousand more unmarried women than men in Massachusetts alone, what shall we say of the rest of the so mis-called United States? Mrs. Wells wittily describes some one who had had “half an offer.” It is to be feared that some most lovable women have not even reached to that dreadful moment of suspense. It is the “Lost Chord,” and deeply to be deplored. It is true that in many a retired village some half-dozen very clever, well-educated, good women pass their lonely lives with no chance to “better their condition.” No wonder that some of them make what their families call very bad marriages.

On one point I do agree with Mrs. Wells, when she refers to the horrible literature with which our market is flooded, turning life into a dissecting-room. That, indeed, may well frighten a susceptible and nervous woman. It is a shocking wrong and nuisance that popular magazines should publish stories which are read by young girls, enabling them, as Mrs. Wells says, to count “the various kinds of kisses which mark the advent and climax of a lover’s regard. Love itself is just as subtle and unselfish as ever it was ; passion is as true and noble ; but their parasites are deadly.” This is a splendid summing-up. But I do not agree that such reading makes a girl “love her mother more,” or that she “stays at home,” growing more healthful, and finding “indefinite interests enough to make single life very pleasant.”

I fear the novels of to-day have had a very different result. This literature has had a vicious effect on the manners, if not on the morals, of our girls. It has led to the loud, unsexed, and vulgar product which we observe more in Europe than here. I do not think it has led to self-analysis, but to a demoralization of both young girls and young married women.

No doubt amongst the higher classes (if we have such a thing) the increased expense of living keeps many of the men from asking the women of their choice to marry them. So much the worse for the men. No factor in a man’s fortune is so certain as a good

wife. If he fails, she can work. Women have proved during the last twenty years that they are a success as bread-winners. And where love goes before like a light in the pathway, who is such a tonic, when a man is down, as a good wife? Who will console him for the decline in stocks like the courageous creature who will say, "Never mind, Horatio, we can live in the country now; we *still have each other* and the children. Don't dare to say you are down while you have me and them, and now we will see what I can do"?

It would be worth several Baring Brothers' failures to have a woman say that. And do we not know many who have said it, and lived it too? Yes.

The great defect of the age is the lack of confidence between men and women on this point. Each should be thoroughly permeated with the idea of the other's happiness, and know that each is invaluable and necessary to the other.

In that sweetest of love-stories, "White Heather," we have the model girl, Meenie, who, rising above all the prejudices of caste, determines to marry her Ronald, and comes to Glasgow to save him from enlisting, and from going to the bad. She says, with a touch of wounded pride in her voice:

"Ronald, I have come all the way from the Highlands to save you."

And she tells him bravely that she was making no sacrifice to take him. She puts heart and hope into the brave, foolish fellow, of whom love has made a coward, and she consents to a Scotch marriage, under proper *chaperonage* (the idea of using this wretched French word under the shadow of Ben Loyal, and the Mudal, and Loch Naber, and Clebrig!), and these were halcyon days. The rich lover whom the ambitious sister wished Meenie to marry was sent to the right-about, for Meenie reasoned rightly that it was of no consequence to anybody but Ronald and herself whom she married; and so the rich lover was discarded. And Ronald turned out all right. Let all young ladies who hesitate about marrying the man whom they wish to marry read the beautiful, clean story of "White Heather," and, if they can find a Ronald, marry him on the spot.

It is a good book to read in these degenerate days, when "Love's Sacrifice" is out of date. It is a strong and healthy pulse which beats in the white wrist of Meenie. She knew that

with *her* Ronald would be a success, without *her* a failure ; and love told her fortune with unerring accuracy.

To be sure, there was a rich American who helped along, but that does not make the moral less binding.

It would be better, no doubt, to have a dowry, to step into a well-furnished brown-stone house given by papa, to have a bank account on both sides ; and then perhaps more of our girls would marry, if any sort of young man would ask them.

But when all that has happened to the fortunate young pair in whose pathway we strew roses, and around whom we crowd with congratulations, and ivory-bound prayer-books, we have still several millions of beating hearts unmated.

In this matter civilization has made a mistake. The birds and the squirrels make no such blunders. We do not hear of an old-maid nightingale singing to herself, forlornly, on a withered bough, nor of a selfish gray bachelor squirrel, going to his Union Club in an old oak-tree, eating his acorn, presumably served with truffles, all by himself.

To be sure, they neither of them have to consult Wall Street tickers or order Worth dresses.

Life with us is smothered in appliances. It could be very gay if it were not for its amusements, and very luxurious if it were not for its luxuries : both are overdone ; and the first effect of our crude civilization is, with all our cleverness, to copy that which we ought to throw away, and to throw away that which is our peerless birthright. For if there ever was a country where young men and young women ought to marry for love, and to hope for a successful future, it is this country. We have seen that the rent-roll, the dowry, and the brown-stone house do not always bring happiness. We read every day that confession in the details of the divorce court. Therefore, why should not two strong young hearts say ?—

“ Never mind ; whose happiness but yours and mine ? ”

Mrs. Wells says, wisely : “ There are cycles and epochs in the civilizing processes of affection.” It is to be feared that we are in a selfish cycle in which man desires marriage less than ever. Why he ever desired it has puzzled some absinthe-drinking Frenchmen.

We should be sorry to believe that woman was ever so untrue to herself as not to desire the fireside, the cradle, the cherub faces,

the infinite sacrifice and the infinite rewards of wifehood and motherhood. And we join with Mrs. Wells in saying: "The time will come when all noble women and men will be married."

For even the mistakes; the patient, brute-loving wife; the faithful, hopeful, weak husband, who waits and hopes; the sorrowful story of the imprudent marriage and its sad consequences; the foolish waiting and putting-off of marriage until fortune shall come, as if two could not court the fickle goddess better than one—even these mistakes and blunders prove that it is a "right road to travel," one we were all born to walk over on our upward path; and if any woman refuses to marry because of self-conceit, or because any learning or profession is better than marriage; if she regards selfish ease and the environment more than the man himself, then she is unworthy to read "White Heather," or even go a-salmon-fishing with that dear hero and heroine of William Black's best story.

I have not answered Mrs. Wells at all. She has still the fort untaken. Indeed, we neither of us know why our girls do not marry; we can only hope that they will "mend their ways," and imitate Mrs. Somerville when they are married, however superior they may be. For it is asserted that, while Mrs. Somerville's bureaus were full of diplomas, Dr. Somerville's buttons were always sewed on in the right place and his dinners were admirably served.

M. E. W. SHERWOOD.